

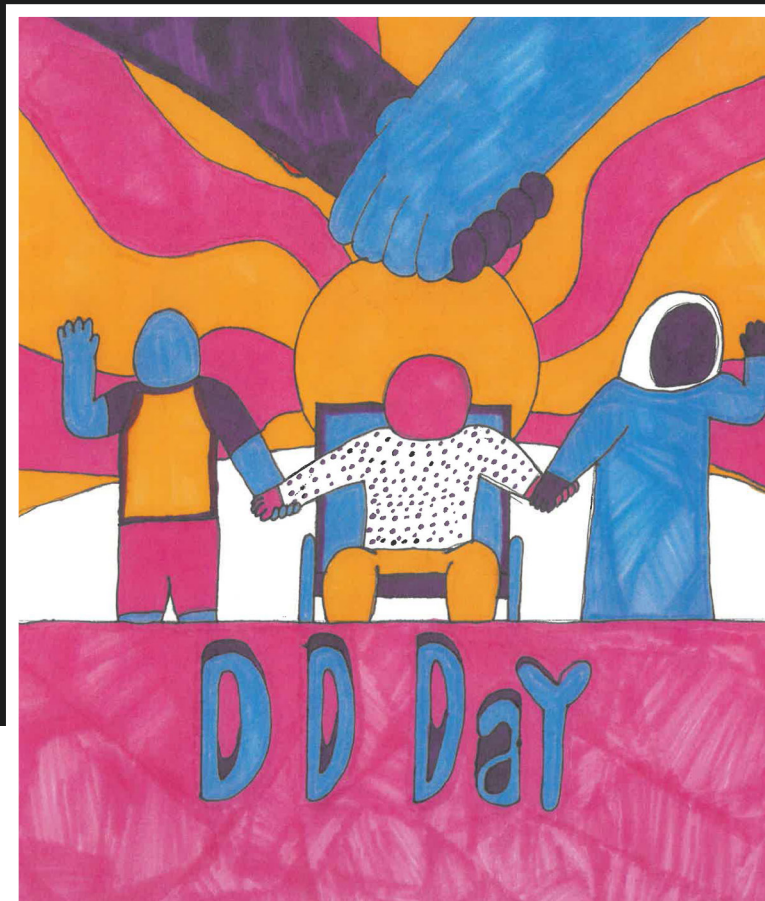
38TH DD DAY



THURSDAY, MAY 28, 2026
Doors open at 8:00 AM

The Conference Center Niagara Falls
101 Old Falls Street - Niagara Falls NY 14303
Visit www.ddday.org to register online

Thank you to our 2026 Presenting Sponsor

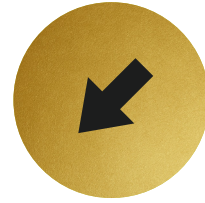


2026 SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

THERE IS A BRAND-NEW CONFERENCE SCHEDULE LINEUP FOR 2026:

- **8:00 am - 9:00 am** **Registration**
- **9:00 am - 9:30 am** **Welcome Announcement ▪ Art Award Showcased**
- **9:30 am - 10:30 am** **Keynote - *doors will be closed***
- **10:00 am - 3:00 pm** **Vendor Fair**
- **10:00 am - 2:00 pm** **Healthy You Corner - Cataract Room**
- **11:00 am - 12:00 pm** **Morning Breakout Sessions**
- **12:00 pm - 12:15 pm** **Lunch Line Up**
- **12:15 pm - 1:30 pm** **Lunch ▪ Award Ceremony**
- **1:45 pm - 2:45 pm** **Afternoon Breakout Sessions**
- **3:00 pm - 5:00 pm** **Reception ▪ Gift Basket Raffle**

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



38th Annual Developmental
Disabilities Awareness Day
Conference

Meet Our
**KEYNOTE
SPEAKER**

JESI STRACHAM

Speaker · Life Advocate · Fitness & Nutrition Coach

Jesi is a **trailblazing entrepreneur, speaker, adaptive athlete, and no-bull advocate for human potential**. After a devastating motorcycle accident left her paralyzed, Jesi didn't waste time romanticizing rock bottom. She rebuilt. Relentlessly. What began as survival turned into a mission: helping people stop standing in their own way and start taking radical ownership of their lives.

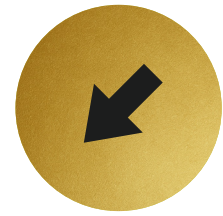
She is the **co-owner of Peak State Peptides**, a human optimization company focused on elevating health, performance, and longevity through education, mindset, and advanced wellness strategies. She also **co-developed Wheel With Me Adapt Fit**, the first fitness app built by wheelchair users, for wheelchair users; designed to improve strength, independence, and confidence where traditional fitness systems fall short. Jesi is the **founder of the Wheel With Me Foundation**, a 501c3 nonprofit dedicated to bridging the massive gap between inpatient rehab and real life. Through community events, empowerment weeks, and immersive experiences for adult wheelchair users, the foundation focuses on independence, accountability, and long-term growth, not inspiration porn.

As an athlete, Jesi has **completed 15 Tough Mudder obstacle course races, including four 24-hour events, and has competed at the CrossFit Games**, proving that discipline beats excuses every time. Her work sits at the intersection of mindset, resilience, and execution. On stage, online, or in the trenches with the people she serves, Jesi challenges others to stop waiting for motivation and start doing the work. She's not here to play small. She's here to build strong humans and leave a legacy that moves people to action.



AM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS



11:00 AM -
12:00 PM

INTENDED AUDIENCE KEY: I=INDIVIDUAL, F=FAMILY, P=PROFESSIONAL, E=EVERYBODY

#1. STRENGTHENING THE REGIONAL NETWORK FOR SELF-ADVOCACY

Dr. Alonzo Kelly , Kelly Leadership Group, LLC Sponsored by The Arc Allegany-Steuben.

Dr. Alonzo Kelly presents an engaging session on Strengthening Networks for Self-Advocates, focused on building meaningful connections, shared leadership, and collective power. Participants will explore practical strategies for collaboration, communication, and mutual support across rural communities. Dr. Kelly will highlight ways Self-Advocates can amplify their voices, influence systems, and sustain strong networks that promote equality, inclusion, and long-term advocacy success for individuals, organizations and movements committed to lasting social change.

(E) Red Jacket Room

#2. AI AS ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY: PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Laura Mack, Assistant Director of Client Services, Justine Kulczyk, AT Evaluator and Instructor, UB Center for Assistive Technology.

This presentation examines how artificial intelligence is reshaping assistive technology to support individuals with disabilities. It will outline key categories of AI-driven tools and provide examples of each. The session will also cover practical applications, potential benefits, common limitations, and important ethical considerations associated with implementing AI-based supports.

(E) Ball Room 1

#3. PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS: WHAT NYS GRADUATION CHANGES MEAN FOR STUDENTS

Tonja Weichman, Director of Programs, Parent Network of WNY

This presentation provides an overview of New York State's updated graduation requirements, highlighting key shifts designed to offer students greater flexibility and relevance. Participants will learn about the state's implementation timeline and how districts can prepare for upcoming changes. The session will also explore the Portrait of a Graduate, outlining the competencies and skills NYS envisions for all students. Attendees will leave with a clear understanding of what to expect and how these changes support student success.

(F,P) Whitney Room

#4. MAKING THE ART OF ADVOCACY WORK FOR YOU: BECOMING A CHANGE AGENT

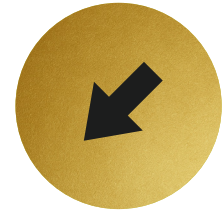
BJ Stasio, Western Region Board Member/Executive Committee, Self-Advocacy Assoc. of New York State (SANYS) Co-Creator, Art of Advocacy, Inc., Max Donatelli, Family Advocate & Co-Creator, Art of Advocacy, Inc.

This workshop will provide an overview of the Art of Advocacy: Assuring the Rights of people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Participants will learn: How do you make contacts with your elected? How do you keep a relationship with your elected? Why is it important to build networks? How do you build respect as an advocate and maintain credibility? Always honor those who get you where you are. Those who support you are very important to your mission as an advocate.

(E) Porter Room

AM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS



11:00 AM -
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#5. BEST PRACTICES FOR PREVENTING ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Sara Nelson, Supervising Quality of Care Facility Review Specialist, NYS Justice Center, Brandi Young, Occupational Therapist, Quality of Care Facility Review Specialist, NYS Justice Center, Martu Jahbateh, Quality of Care Facility Review Specialist, NYS Justice Center

Justice Center's library of resources includes topics such as corrective action planning, professional boundaries, and responding to medical emergencies. This session will also highlight the Justice Center's "Could This Happen in Your Program" manual and offer best practices for incorporating information from this resource into a program's daily operations. This presentation will provide an overview of the toolkits available to providers and highlight best practices to promote the health, safety, and dignity of all people with special needs.

(P) Schoellkopf Room

#6. PREVENTATIVE AND MAINTENANCE HEALTHCARE IN THE IDD POPULATION

Teri Bellaire, BSN, Clinical Director, Person Centered Services

The importance of preventative health testing for maintenance and independence. Overall discussion pertaining to the importance of yearly physicals and follow up with specialists. Participants will be provided with a handout with OPWDD recommendations for preventive testing. The presenter will discuss barriers and alternatives (telehealth).

(F,I) Tubman Room

#7. SPEAKER'S BUREAU: THE VOICE OF ADVOCACY

Greg Kamp, Director, Marketing & Communications, Mary Cariola Center, Carly Hamilton, Social Work Manager, Mary Cariola Center.

At the heart of any human service non-profit organization or company is story telling, and those stories are best told by those who are served. The phrase "speakers bureau" puts fear into many who might otherwise have wonderful stories to tell elected officials, the media, staff and the general community. This seminar will discuss different ways to approach a speaker's bureau, attract volunteers, position them for success and advocate for disability rights.

(E) Governor's Room

#8. SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS WITH MULTIPLE DIAGNOSES: HOW TRI-D BRIDGES THE SYSTEMS SILOS

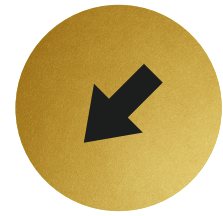
Elizabeth Caton-Burm, Psych Nurse Practitioner/Program Manager, Catholic Charities Family & Community Services, Hannah, Therapy Dog, Catholic Charities Family & Community Services

While navigating two diagnoses is hard, treating triple diagnosis-mental illness, substance abuse, and intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD)-is exponentially harder. This presentation details best practice research to outline the ideal trajectory for treating this population, using Tri-D as an exemplar. It evaluates the effectiveness of the theoretical models and exposes weaknesses in the system that have influenced the program since its inception. Participants are left with a foundation to begin affecting change on multiple levels.

(F,P) Olmsted Room

AM

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#9. ADVOCACY THAT SEES BEYOND THE SYSTEM

Megan Rechin, Vice President of Communications & Growth Agency, Aspire of WNY, Jen Argy, Supported Individual, Resident & Communications Intern, Aspire of WNY, Shana Kuras, Event & Media Coordinator, Aspire of WNY

This presentation will focus on creative, community-focused advocacy approaches for individuals with disabilities that intentionally look beyond the current limitations and regulations of the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) system. While the OPWDD system provides essential supports, its structure can limit creative innovation and meaningful, person-centered change. We will discuss strategies for developing and implementing grassroots initiatives, unique partnerships, and non-traditional support models that prioritize true inclusion and self-determination in the community. The presentation focuses on building a collaborative relationship with OPWDD, not working in opposition. We will show how advocates and community leaders can partner with OPWDD to advance more inclusive, innovative, person-first services.

(E) DeVeaux Room

#10. BEYOND THE BOWL: MEALTIME STRATEGIES TO NOURISH AND FLOURISH

Ashley Arnone, Occupational Therapist, The Children's League

This presentation will explore mealtime sensory, oral motor, and behavioral challenges that often present in children with Autism and neurodiverse backgrounds as well as provide practical strategies for feeding success. The goal is to reduce stress at mealtimes, increase caregiver confidence, build positive relationships with food.

(E) Adams Room

#11. WHAT IS FUNCTION-BASED THINKING (FBT) AND HOW CAN IT HELP CAREGIVERS, TEACHERS, CLINICIANS, AND STAFF?

Deborah Napolitano, Professor, Daemen University

An FBA helps us understand why someone may be struggling. Used in many settings, FBA's focus on understanding what a person is communicating. FBT builds on this by helping individuals, caregivers, and teams consider the whole person. This also allows us to better consider the needs of others and build empathy. FBT can help us adjust our responses in the moment, teach new skills, and create supportive environments, helping individuals to thrive.

(E) Tesla Room

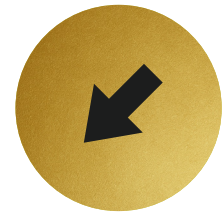
#12. FORGET LIMITATIONS, FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS

Jennifer Ball, Occupational Therapist, People Inc., Ashley Bower, Occupational Therapist, People Inc. Brian Clayback, General Manager, People First Mobility.

Review of adaptive equipment and wheelchairs to meet the need for mobility, safety and positioning. Process for obtaining an assessment, equipment trial, insurance submission, and alternate funding options will also be discussed.

(E) Hennepin Room

PM BREAKOUT SESSIONS



1:45 PM -
2:45 PM

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#13. KEYNOTE NUTRITION - BALL ROOM 2

#14. ADVANCED CARE PLANNING FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES: LEGAL, ETHICAL, AND PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO PERSON CENTERED PLANNING.

Dr. Mark Zambron, Primary Care Medicaid Director, UBMD/Evergreen, Collin Ranney, Patient Experience Manager, Evergreen, Andrea Keogh, IDD Pediatric Program Manager, Evergreen.

Advance care planning is essential for all individuals, including those with developmental disabilities, and is most effective when completed prior to an emergency. This presentation will explore the legal, ethical, and practical aspects of person-centered-planning, including capacity versus competency and the importance of empowering individuals to participate in medical and end-of-life decisions. It highlights the role of families, guardians, and healthcare providers, reviewing MOLST and Healthcare Proxies, and examines outcomes when no plan is in place.

(E) Schoellkoph Room

#15. WHAT ARE IDDO AND THE OMBUDSMAN?

Samuel Mattle, Executive, Center for Self-Advocacy.

This will be a presentation on the Ombudsman program and providing information on what an Ombudsman does for someone with an intellectual/developmental disability.

(E) DeVaux Room

#16. HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF REGARDING YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Loren Shibley, Advocate, L.E.A.D.E.R.S, Celest Jacobs, Advocate, L.E.A.D.E.R.S, Hail Lewis, Advocate, L.E.A.D.E.R.S, Martha Perez, Advocate, L.E.A.D.E.R.S, Kathleen Collado, Advocate, Theresa Smith, Advocate, Renee Kancar, Advocate

There will be a panel from the advocacy group named L.E.A.D.E.R.S (L-Listen, E-Equality, A-Advocacy, D-Determination, E-Equal, R-Rights, S-Support) that will be discussing several areas of rights individuals have and their role in actions and responsibilities they need to execute to be successful.

(I, F) Red Jacket Room

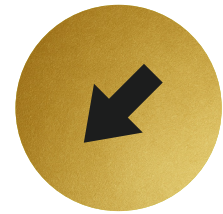
#17. THE CENTERED

Erin McGee, Director, Learning and Development, Person Centered Services, Carlie Arnone, Senior Manager, Engagement, Inclusion and Belonging, Person Centered Services

'The Centered Caregiver,' focuses on the courageous experiences and invisible labor of those supporting individuals with I/DD along with loved ones. The presentation will include reflections from the audience, caregiving challenges, signs of burnout, and differences between wellness and overwhelm. Key strategies cover boundaries, micro resets, delegation, asking for help, and building support networks. It concludes with prompts for self-reflection and actions you can take when the journey is tough.

(F) Porter Room

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2:45 PM

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#18. PATH TO EMPOWERMENT: RUNNING YOUR OWN LIFE PLAN MEETING

Courtney Helmich, Self-Advocate, SASI, Craig Mennig, Member Relations Manager, Person Centered Services

A scripted role play with one person playing the role of a person receiving services and the other playing the role of a care coordinator. The lead presenter will periodically pause the role play to inject information and engage in discussion with the attendees. The topic will include the value of running your own life plan, support, running your life plan to the extent you are comfortable, and the importance of the life plan. The presentation has a focus on responsibilities and empowerment—running one's own life plan meeting being used as an example of the value in taking responsibilities in other parts of one's life.

(I, F) Olmsted Room

#19. THE HIDDEN WORK OF DISABILITY: THE MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, AND FUNCTIONAL LABOR OF BEING INCLUDED

Dr. Carolyn Shivers, Director of Disability Studies, Institute on Disability Awareness at Niagara University, Erica Rodman, Educational Program Developer, Institute on Disability Awareness at Niagara University.

People with disabilities carry an enormous amount of "unpaid labor" that goes unnoticed. This labor is emotional, physical, cognitive, social, and logistical. This presentation will cover the different types of work that people with disabilities may have to put into full participation in society. We will help family members and service providers recognize the subtle ways that people with disabilities can be denied dignity daily and how to better support them.

(E) Whitney Room

#20. MAKING SENSE OF SENSORY-A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

Ashley Arnone, Occupational Therapist, The Children's League

A brief overview of sensory processing and the sensory systems followed by practical strategies for families and caregivers to identify sensory-based strengths and challenges. Strategies will have a neurodiversity-affirming lens.

(E) Adams Room

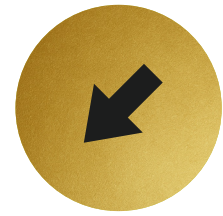
#21. YOUNG ADULTHOOD: FROM HOME TO SUCCESS

Luther Layne, Self-Advocate

Luther Layne will discuss how hard it was to go from family to a group home, as well as being evicted after years of success. He will also discuss the supports he had, the barriers he faced, and tips/advice on how to become independent upon turning 18 or 21.

(I, F) Hennepin Room

PM BREAKOUT SESSIONS



1:45 PM -
2:45 PM

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#22. TOGETHER INCLUDING EVERY STUDENTS (TIES)

Jennifer Rautenstrauch, WNY TIES Program Manager, Starbridge Inc., Karen Polizzi, TIES Coordinator for Springville-Griffith Institute

Together Including Every Student (TIES), a program of Starbridge, promotes the participation of students and young adults who have developmental disabilities in inclusive, organized, extracurricular and community activities, supported by trained peer volunteers. TIES has been implemented in several school districts across Western New York region. The presentation will highlight the value and benefits of inclusive experiences for people with and without disabilities, and will feature perspectives from parents, participants, peer volunteers, and school administrators.

(F) Tesla Room

#23. OPWDD SELF-ADVOCATE SPEAK OUT

Willow Baer, Commissioner, OPWDD, Rachel Baker, Chief Strategy Officer, OPWDD, BJ Stasio, Peer Specialist
Your voice matters. We want to hear from you. Join OPWDD for a Self-Advocate Speak out to share your ideas, experiences, and what matters most to you. Your lived experience helps shape OPWDD's Strategic Plan and guide our future work. During this session you can: share your experiences, talk about what is working well, talk about what needs to change, share ideas for the future and ask questions and share concerns. This is your time to speak. We are here to listen and learn from you. What you share will help shape OPWDD's future.

(E) Governors Room



EVENT FEATURES



ART GALLERY

Pop-up Art Gallery – Back by popular demand! Art Programs throughout WNY will display the many talented works of the artists who join them in their studios. Located throughout the building you will enjoy original and celebrated artwork while having the opportunity to learn more about these unique programs. Enjoy the show!

AGENCY VENDOR FAIR

A wide variety of agencies and vendors who serve people with developmental disabilities will be on hand to provide information and linkage for everyone in attendance. Some vendors may be selling some of their products at the conference, so be sure to bring some extra money for shopping!

THERAPY DOGS

Throughout the public areas of the convention, there will be therapy dogs and their owners on hand who can help provide general information about therapy dog programs and answer questions you may have. There will also be items for sale to promote their program.



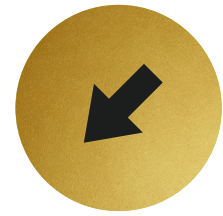
DD DAY MERCHANDISE (CASH AND CREDIT ACCEPTED)

Make sure to stop by our Souvenir MERCH SHOP to pick up your 2026 DD DAY swag. Don't miss out!!!! Specialized tees. The winning DD Day logo design can be found on this year's Tee shirts so get them while they're hot.
Tees (S, M, L, XL) \$15 ** Tees (XXL, XXXL) \$20

RECEPTION & BASKET RAFFLE - 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM

There will be free pop and appetizers, along with a basket raffle and cash bar. You must be present to win the basket raffle.

2026 DD DAY



REGISTRATION

LEARN. CONNECT. CELEBRATE.

JOIN ONE OF THE LARGEST DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES CONFERENCES IN THE NATION, BRINGING TOGETHER INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, PROFESSIONALS, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS ACROSS WESTERN NEW YORK.

WHAT TO EXPECT:

- Inspiring keynote speakers
- Educational workshops
- Vendor fair + community resources
- Art show featuring local artists
- Awards luncheon
- Health & wellness activities

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

- Individuals with disabilities
- Families & caregivers
- Direct support professionals
- Educators & service providers
- Community advocates

SPECIAL EVENT PARKING RATE OF \$5

TO GET THIS DISCOUNT, BRING YOUR PARKING SLIP INTO THE EVENT TO GET VALIDATED!

- Registration deadline is May 11, 2026
- Registration on the day of conference is \$35
- No lunch provided. Cash or credit ONLY. No invoicing will be done.

Additional accommodations: If you need an interpreter, FM loop, or other accommodations, please contact: Stacey Gura at Stacey.gura@sasinc.org

TICKETS & SPONSORSHIPS

MULTIPLE TICKET AND SPONSORSHIP OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE, INCLUDING SCHOLARSHIPS.

SCAN OR CLICK THE QR CODE TO REGISTER TODAY!



Hosted by: DDAWNY DD Day Committee • Bringing our community together for 38 years

WWW.DDAWNY.ORG/DD-DAY